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ABSTRACT

To examine the question of how and to what extent Mexican American and Anglo mothers differed in their assessments of desirable role behavior for the teachers of their children, a 27-item Likert-type scale was devised and used to interview 10 Mexican American and 10 Anglo mothers. The questionnaire, written in both Spanish and English, was designed to examine several different dimensions of the teacher's role. While some of the results were in accord with published literature concerning linguistic and cultural differences between Mexican American and Anglo populations, some literature based differences which might have been expected did not appear in this sample. Both Mexican American and Anglo mothers made "field sensitive" choices concerning teachers' warmth, friendliness and affection with students and praises of students. Both groups of mothers placed high importance on rigorous and demanding teaching standards. More Mexican American mothers stressed competitiveness than did Anglo mothers. Though this research was preliminary in nature, was not based on random sampling, and may have been influenced by uncontrolled socioeconomic variables, the survey method provided questions for future study. Table 1 details the study's results. (CM)

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UNA BUENA MAESTRA / A GOOD TEACHER:
A PRELIMINARY REPORT OF PARENTAL VIEWS
IN A TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Presented at

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By

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When I recently asked a student of mine to sum up what she considered her role to be as an elementary schoolteacher in a multicultural classroom, she replied rather wryly, "All things to all people!" The more than superficial truth of her remark is supported by several studies which point out that teachers are subject to the pressure of many varying role expectations--among them, those that they hold for themselves; those held by their professional superiors and colleagues; and those held by their clients, i.e., students and their parents (Hansen 1979:76, Wolcott 1967). The possibility of variance is particularly acute when the teachers, administrators and clients represent diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds.

The fact that multicultural classrooms call for increased sensitivity to cultural differences and informed teaching skills is being finally -- if belatedly-- recognized by the educational establishment. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, as well as a significant number of state teaching agencies, have recently incorporated specific requirements that a multicultural emphasis be included as an integral part of teacher education programs. One unfortunate, but predictable, consequence is that many teachers and teacher educators are looking for simplified "quick answers" to a number of very complex questions.

In this paper I will report on some exploratory research in progress which considers only one aspect of this multi-faceted problem. Briefly, it examines the question of how and to what extent Mexican American and Anglo mothers differ in their assessments of desirable role behavior for the teachers of their children. There is, of course, abundant literature to suggest that systematic differences exist in Mexican American and Anglo ~~cultural~~ learning patterns. (e.g. Madsen 1967, Madsen and Shapira 1970, Ramirez and Price-Williams 1974). But some--I am tempted to say much--of the research in this area suffers from a tendency toward overly stereotypical "formula" thinking.

One recent study by Ramirez and Casteneda (1974), proposes a dichotomy between Mexican American and Anglo cognitive styles. The authors hold that most Mexican American students have "field-sensitive" cognitive styles, learning best in personalized group efforts, while most Anglo students display "field independence," with a stronger need for individual achievement. According to this research, different teaching strategies are appropriate for the two ethnic groups. To briefly summarize the highlights of this aspect of their model, field-sensitive teachers are those who stress "personal relationship" styles in interacting with their students; display physical and verbal expressions of approval and warmth; encourage student cooperation and group identity; and present information in humanized or story format. Field-independent

teachers, on the other hand, stress "incentive-motivation" styles; maintain more formal and restrained relationships with students; encourage student competitiveness; and place emphasis on analytical thinking and abstract ideas. If Ramirez and Casteneda are correct, then we would expect to find that Mexican American mothers prefer field-sensitive teaching behaviors, while Anglo mothers would favor the field-independent approach.

In the fall of 1979, it was decided to examine this model as a group research project in a graduate course in Educational Anthropology. That semester, fourteen students participated in the research, including six Mexican Americans and eight Anglos. With the exception of three Anglos, all of the other students were currently teaching in a bilingual classroom in the Dallas Independent School District and were fluent in both Spanish and English.

A 27-item Likert-type scale was devised to elicit parental evaluations of desirable teaching qualities. The questionnaire was written in both English and Spanish and was designed to examine several different dimensions of the teacher's role, not only as an information-conveyer, but also as a classroom manager, student evaluator, disciplinarian, and interactor with students and their families. In addition, two open-ended questions were included: 1) "Is there anything with we haven't mentioned that you feel is also important about being a good

teacher?;" and 2) "If you had to sum up in a few words just the most important things a teacher should do, what would you say?".

The teachers were divided into two teams; those on Team I each interviewed ten Mexican American mothers, and those on Team II interviewed the same number of Anglo mothers. It should be noted that convenience rather random sampling was employed. Also, some of the teachers interviewed mothers of children then enrolled in their classes, which may have influenced the mother's responses. Most importantly, there were some very clear socioeconomic differences between the two groups.

In regard to family income, those having annual incomes below $15,000 accounted for 65% of the Mexican Americans, but only 30% of the Anglos. No Mexican Americans had incomes above $30,000, but 20% of the Anglos did.

The contrast was equally marked in regard to years of formal schooling. Among the Mexican American mothers, 66% had only an elementary school education, 23% had some years of high school training, and 11% were high school graduates. In the Anglo sample, 11% had some high school training, 46% were high school graduates, 33% had some college, and 10% were college graduates.

The Mexican American mothers were also younger than the Anglo mothers. The approximate median age for the Mexican Americans was 25 and for the Anglo mother it was 35.

The questionnaires were administered in either Spanish or English at the respondent's choice. Seventy-three percent of the Mexican American mothers preferred the Spanish version with only 27% taking it in English.

The findings of this initial survey, while in no way definitive, are in many ways intriguing. Table I provides the percentage responses in each category of the 27-item scale, and also shows Chi Square test results in Column Six. Those results marked with an asterisk are significant at the .05 probability level or below.

Some of the results are in accord with published literature concerning linguistic and cultural differences between Mexican American and Anglo populations. Item 20, for example, presents the not unexpected finding that bilingual teaching abilities are much more important to Mexican American mothers than to Anglo mothers. Other non-surprising items are 13, 14, 21, 22 and 23. Compared to the Anglo mothers, Mexican American mothers in this sample place greater importance on teachers maintaining a neat and modest demeanor, stressing obedience and respect to authority figures, getting to know the students' families, presenting information about Mexican history and culture, and encouraging traditional sex roles for boys and girls.

However, some differences which might be expected based on the literature do <u>not</u> appear in this sample. For example, not only Mexican American but also Anglo mothers made "field-sensitive" choices in agreeing that teachers should be warm,

friendly and affectionate with students (item 9), and should encourage students to work cooperatively and help each other (item 17). And another field-sensitive teaching strategy seen in item 12 (praises students often, even if their grades are low) was adjudged more important to Anglos than to Mexican Americans.

Moreover, both Mexican Americans and Anglos placed high importance on several teacher characteristics that some researchers would associate primarily with Anglos. Both ethnic groups felt it was important for teachers to: award good grades only when they are deserved (item 7); emphasize loyal citizenship to America (item 15); present information about American history and culture (item 16); encourage students to think independently (item 19); and teach students to think about concepts and new answers to questions (item 25). In addition, both groups displayed some ambiguity on the importance they placed in presenting information about Black history and culture (item 26).

It is also notable that compared to the Anglo mothers, Mexican American mothers placed greater importance on more rigorous and demanding teaching standards. This is evidenced in the Mexican American approval of items 5 (gives and checks daily homework), 6 (tests frequently), 8 (fails when necessary) and 24 (drills for memorization of facts).

Perhaps the most surprising response in the entire survey relates to Question 10 (encourages students to compete

with other students). In strong contrast to conventional and academic wisdom that Anglos are much more likely to stress competitiveness than Mexican Americans, this sample responded in exactly the opposite manner.

As earlier stated, this research is preliminary in nature, is not based on random sampling, and may be heavily influenced by socioeconomic variables which have not been controlled for. The survey method has, however provided some questions for future study which will be explored through ethnographic research anticipated to begin in the fall of 1980.

In the meantime, the present results appear provocative and cast doubts on the validity of the apparently overly simplistic field sensitive/field independent paradigm. They do substantiate, however, that today's teachers must learn to develop a responsive, flexible and versatile repertoire of teaching styles and strategies if they are to be fully effective in the multicultural classroom. "All things to all people" may not be far off the mark!

TABLE 1

EVALUATION OF DESIRABLE TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS
BY MEXICAN AMERICAN AND ANGLO MOTHERS

n - 140: 70 Mexican American; 70 Anglo

		0/0 Not at all imp.	0/0 Not imp.	0/0 Un-sure	0/0 Imp.	0/0 Very imp.	X^2 D.F. Significance
A GOOD TEACHER:							
1. knows a lot about the subject that he or she teaches	M/A	0	0	0	22.9	77.1	1.06804 2
	Anglo	0	0	1.4	24.3	74.3	0.5862
2. can explain information in a way students can understand	M/A	0	0	0	18.6	81.4	3.12386 1
	Anglo	0	0	0	7.1	92.9	0.0772
3. is interested and enthusiastic about the subject	M/A	0	0	5.7	31.4	62.9	4.41403 3
	Anglo	0	1.4	1.4	22.9	74.3	0.2201
4. is more intelligent than the average person	M/A	0	8.6	24.3	[illegible].1	30.0	21.71201 3
	Anglo	0	28.6	15.7	50.0	5.7	0.0001 *
5. gives students daily homework & checks to see that it is done	M/A	0	5.7	7.1	38.6	48.6	17.91663 4
	Anglo	1.4	24.3	17.1	32.9	24.3	0.0013 *
6. tests students often to make sure they are learning	M/A	0	0	2.9	35.7	61.4	13.65738 3
	Anglo	0	7.1	7.1	51.4	34.3	0.0034 *
7. gives good grades only when they are deserved	M/A	0	0	4.3	40.0	55.7	7.47059 3
	Anglo	0	5.7	1.4	51.4	41.4	0.0583
8. fails students who have not learned enough	M/A	0	7.1	15.7	22.9	54.3	15.21719 3
	Anglo	0	0	25.7	42.9	31.4	0.0016 *

			0/0 Not at all imp.	0/0 Not imp.	0/0 Un-sure	0/0 Imp.	0/0 Very imp.	x^2 D.F. Significance
9.	is warm, friendly and affectionate with students	M/A	0	2.9	4.3	44.3	48.6	5.42850 4
		Anglo	1.4	7.1	10.0	31.4	50.0	0.2461
10.	encourages students to compete with other students	M/A	0	4.3	7.1	40.0	48.6	45.14481 4
		Anglo	10.0	37.1	17.1	21.4	14.3	0.0000 *
11.	keeps students quiet & well-behaved in the classroom	M/A	0	2.9	14.3	42.9	40.0	5.66902 4
		Anglo	1.4	11.4	12.9	44.3	30.0	0.2253
12.	praises students often, even if their grades are low	M/A	5.7	18.6	25.7	30.0	20.00	24.66695 4
		Anglo	1.4	1.4	10.0	44.3	42.9	0.0001 *
13.	has a neat, modest appearance in dress & manner	M/A	0	1.4	4.3	28.6	65.7	25.15871 3
		Anglo	0	7.1	5.7	62.9	24.3	0.0000 *
14.	teaches students to obey & respect teachers & other adults	M/A	0	0	0	18.6	81.4	16.64192 4
		Anglo	1.4	2.9	5.7	38.6	51.4	0.0023 *
15.	emphasizes being a good citizen & loyal to America	M/A	0	2.9	10.0	35.7	51.4	0.31062 3
		Anglo	0	4.3	8.6	37.1	50.0	0.9580
16.	presents information about American history, traditions & values	M/A	0	0	12.9	47.1	40.0	3.13290 3
		Anglo	0	4.3	11.4	47.1	37.1	0.3716
17.	encourages students to help other students & work cooperatively	M/A	0	0	4.3	45.7	50.0	1.09741 2
		Anglo	0	0	2.9	38.6	58.6	0.5777
18.	speaks "correct" or "good" English	M/A	0	0	1.5	44.1	54.4	2.51154 2
		Anglo	0	0	2.9	31.4	65.7	0.2849

			0/0 Not at all imp.	0/0 Not imp.	0/0 Un-sure	0/0 Imp.	0/0 Very imp.	X^2 D.F. Significance
19.	encourages students to think independently, even if they disagree with their teacher or their schoolbooks	M/A	0	2.9	15.7	32.9	48.6	2.95291 3
		Anglo	0	0	12.9	41.4	45.7	0.3989
20.	can teach in Spanish as well as in English	M/A	1.4	7.1	10.0	31.4	50.0	52.96396 4
		Anglo	17.1	30.0	27.1	21.4	4.3	0.0000 *
21.	gets to know the families of the students	M/A	0	4.3	10.0	38.6	47.1	44.46732 4
		Anglo	4.3	38.6	17.1	32.9	7.1	0.0000 *
22.	presents information about Mexican history, traditions, and values	M/A	0	2.9	24.3	32.9	40.0	28.65050 4
		Anglo	8.6	18.6	25.7	38.6	8.6	0.0000 *
23.	encourages girls to be ladylike & boys to be manly	M/A	0	1.4	10.0	35.7	52.9	34.17578 4
		Anglo	8.6	31.4	7.1	30.0	22.9	0.0000 *
24.	drills students to memorize facts & the "right" answers	M/A	1.4	5.7	12.9	40.0	40.0	30.58984 4
		Anglo	10.0	35.7	15.7	22.9	15.7	0.0000 *
25.	teaches students to think about ideas & new answers to questions	M/A	0	0	5.7	44.3	50.0	0.18581 2
		Anglo	0	0	7.1	45.7	47.1	0.9113
26.	presents information about Black history, traditions & values	M/A	0	5.7	31.4	37.1	25.7	12.06281 4
		Anglo	8.6	12.9	27.1	40.0	11.4	0.0169 *
27.	asks parents' advice about any problems their children may be having in school	M/A	0	0	2.9	37.1	60.0	0.94074 2
		Anglo	0	0	5.7	40.0	54.3	0.6248

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